

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A switching device for a vehicle parking brake, comprising a handle movable between a first position for engaging the parking brake and a second position for disengaging the parking brake, said handle also movable to a third position between said first and second positions, and an evaluation device, said handle being subjected to a preload force toward said third position when said handle is in one of said first and second positions, said evaluation device adapted to output different control signals to an actuating device of the parking brake based on the position of said handle.
2. The switching device of claim 1, wherein said handle is movable linearly between said first, second and third positions.
3. The switching device of claim 1, wherein said handle is movable within a defined first inner movement range extending from said third position to a first limit point, a first outer movement range extending from said first limit point to said first position, a second inner movement range extending from said third position to a second limit point, and a second outer movement range extending from said second limit point to said second position, said handle being substantially free of forces in said third position, said handle movable in said first inner movement range against a first increasing spring force and in said second inner movement range against a second increasing spring force, said first increasing spring force decreasing at said first limit point and said second increasing spring force decreasing at said second limit point.

4. The switching device of claim 3, wherein said first increasing spring force and said second increasing spring force increase linearly with displacement from said central position.

5. The switching device of claim 3, wherein said handle is movable in said first and said second outer movement ranges against a substantially constant spring force.

6. The switching device of claim 3, wherein said handle is returned from said first position to said third position by a substantially constant spring force in a first outer return movement range and a decreasing spring force in a first inner return movement range, and said handle is returned from said second position to said third position by a substantially constant spring force in a second outer return movement range and a decreasing spring force in a second inner return movement range.

7. The switching device of claim 3, wherein said decreasing spring forces acting upon said handle in said first and said second inner return movement ranges decrease linearly as said handle returns to said central position.

8. The switching device of claim 1, wherein said evaluation device includes a first switch and a second switch that can be switched by said handle.

9. The switching device of claim 8, wherein said evaluation device includes a potentiometric device adjustable by said handle.

10. The switching device of claim 8, wherein said first switch is switched during movement of said handle between said third position and said second position, and said second switch is switched during movement of said handle between said third position and said first position.

11. The switching device of claim 10, wherein said handle is moveable within a first outer movement range extending from a first limit point to said first position and a second outer movement range extending from a second limit point to said second position, said handle is returned from said first position to said third position in a first outer return movement range and said handle is returned from said second position to said third position in a second outer return movement range, said first switch is switched during movement of said handle in said second outer movement range and said second outer return movement range, and said second switch is switched during movement of said handle in said first outer movement range and in said first outer return movement range.

12. The switching device of claim 10, further comprising a first and a second resistor, wherein said first and second switches are electrically connected in series, said first switch shunting out said first resistor and said second switch shunting out said second resistor.

13. The switching device of claim 12, further comprising a third resistor, wherein a voltage signal is applied between said third resistor and said first switch and said second switch, said voltage signal being output as a control signal.

14. A vehicle parking brake system, comprising a brake-application device, an actuating device for actuation of said brake-application device, and a switching device, said switching device having an evaluation device and a handle moveable between a first position and a second position, said handle also movable to a third position between said first and second positions, said handle being subjected to a preload force toward said third position when said handle is in one of said first and said

second positions, said evaluation device adapted to output different control signals to said actuating device based on the position of said handle, said actuating device engaging said brake application device during movement of said handle into said first position and said actuating device releasing said brake application device during movement of said handle into said second position.